

Relevant Statutes and Administrative Code

RCW 42.17.130 states in part: “No elective official nor any employee of his office nor any person appointed to or employed by any public office or agency may use or authorize the use of any of the facilities of a public office or agency, directly or indirectly, for the purpose of assisting a campaign for election of any person to any office or for the promotion of or opposition to any ballot proposition. Facilities of public office or agency include, but are not limited to, use of stationery, postage, machines, and equipment, use of employees of the office or agency during working hours, vehicles, office space, publications of the office or agency and clientele lists of persons served by the office or agency...”

WAC 390-05-271(2) states in part: “RCW 42.17.130 does not prevent a public office or agency from ... (b) making an objective and fair presentation of facts relevant to a ballot proposition, if such action is part of the normal and regular conduct of the office or agency.”

WAC 390-05-273 states: “Normal and regular conduct of a public office or agency, as that term is used in the proviso to RCW 42.17.130, means conduct which is (1) lawful, i.e., specifically authorized, either expressly or by necessary implication, in an appropriate enactment, and (2) usual, i.e., not effected or authorized in or by some extraordinary means or manner. No local office or agency may authorize a use of public facilities for the purpose of assisting a candidate’s campaign or promoting or opposing a ballot proposition, in the absence of a constitutional, charter, or statutory provision separately authorizing such use.”

Apparent Violations

RCW 42.17.360 (5) states that the Commission may, “Upon complaint or upon its own motion, investigate and report apparent violations of this chapter to the appropriate law enforcement authorities;”

RCW 42.17.395(3) states: “In lieu of holding a hearing or issuing an order under this section, the commission may refer the matter to the attorney general or other enforcement agency as provided in RCW 42.17.360.”

Citizen Action Letters

RCW 42.17.400 states: “(1) The attorney general and the prosecuting authorities of political subdivisions of this state may bring civil actions in the name of the state for any appropriate civil remedy, including but not limited to the special remedies provided in RCW 42.17.390.

(2) The attorney general and the prosecuting authorities of political subdivisions of this state may investigate or cause to be investigated the activities of any person who there is reason to believe is or has been acting in violation of this chapter, and may require any such person or any other person reasonably believed to have information concerning the activities of such person to appear at a time and place designated in the county in which such person resides or is found, to give such information under oath and to produce all accounts, bills, receipts, books, paper and documents which may be relevant or material to any investigation authorized under this chapter.

(3) When the attorney general or the prosecuting authority of any political subdivision of this state requires the attendance of any person to obtain such information or the production of the accounts, bills, receipts, books, papers, and documents which may be relevant or material to any investigation authorized under this chapter, he shall issue an order setting forth the time when and the place where attendance is required and shall cause the same to be delivered to or sent by registered mail to the person at least fourteen days before the date fixed for attendance. Such order shall have the same force and effect as a subpoena, shall be effective statewide, and, upon application of the attorney general or said prosecuting authority, obedience to the order may be enforced by any superior court judge in the county where the person receiving it resides or is found, in the same manner as though the order were a subpoena. The court, after hearing, for good cause, and upon application of any person aggrieved by the order, shall have the right to alter, amend, revise, suspend, or postpone all or any part of its provisions. In any case where the order is not enforced by the court according to its terms, the reasons for the court's actions shall be clearly stated in writing, and such action shall be subject to review by the appellate courts by certiorari or other appropriate proceeding.

(4) Any person who has notified the attorney general and the prosecuting attorney in the county in which the violation occurred in writing that there is reason to believe that some provision of this chapter is being or has been violated may himself bring in the name of the state any of the actions (hereinafter referred to as a citizen's action) authorized under this chapter. This citizen action may be brought only if the attorney general and the prosecuting attorney have failed to commence an action hereunder within forty-five days after such notice and such person has thereafter further notified the attorney general and prosecuting attorney that said person will

commence a citizen's action within ten days upon their failure so to do, and the attorney general and the prosecuting attorney have in fact failed to bring such action within ten days of receipt of said second notice. If the person who brings the citizen's action prevails, the judgment awarded shall escheat to the state, but he shall be entitled to be reimbursed by the state of Washington for costs and attorney's fees he has incurred: PROVIDED, That in the case of a citizen's action which is dismissed and which the court also finds was brought without reasonable cause, the court may order the person commencing the action to pay all costs of trial and reasonable attorney's fees incurred by the defendant.

(5) In any action brought under this section, the court may award to the state all costs of investigation and trial, including a reasonable attorney's fee to be fixed by the court. If the violation is found to have been intentional, the amount of the judgment, which shall for this purpose include the costs, may be trebled as punitive damages. If damages or trebled damages are awarded in such an action brought against a lobbyist, the judgment may be awarded against the lobbyist, and the lobbyist's employer or employers joined as defendants, jointly, severally, or both. If the defendant prevails, he shall be awarded all costs of trial, and may be awarded a reasonable attorney's fee to be fixed by the court to be paid by the state of Washington.”